

Wrestling Perspective

• Analysis & Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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Goodhart: The Pilot Responsible For The TWA Crash

By - David Skolnick

By all appearances, the Tri-State Wrestling Alliance (TWA) was the hottest independent promotion in the country last year. TWA cards, headlined by Terry Funk, Cactus Jack, Eddie Gilbert and some of the hottest independent talent in the country, always drew big houses to Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Hall and rave reviews from many hardcore wrestling fans who would travel hundreds of miles to see the shows.

But when you examine Joel Goodhart, the man behind the promotion, it becomes obvious why the TWA went out of business earlier this year. Goodhart reportedly ran out of capital and announced on January 18, that he was going out of business, leaving many TWA season ticket holders with the feeling that they were ripped off and lied to.

"He was not a good businessman at all and because of his ego, he wouldn't take advice from the people who tried to work with him," said Larry Sharpe, who hired Goodhart as a ring announcer before the TWA took off.

After working with Goodhart on and off for four years, Sharpe said his ego got out of control and he had no other choice but to fire Goodhart. By that time, Goodhart had run a few shows with partners that had limited success. It was not until January 1990, that the TWA was officially formed. The shows were unlike most wrestling cards being presented throughout the country. Goodhart's shows were more violent than any others and had more top names than any independent promotion. Goodhart's dream of being a well-known wrestling promoter had come true. He was suddenly a big shot with a comparable ego.

When people talk about Goodhart, it's his ego that becomes the topic of conversation. It was that ego that drove him to make the decisions he made. It was that ego that led to his eventual downfall.

"My opinion is he was more concerned about putting himself over than his wrestlers," said Dennis Coralluzzo, Sharpe's partner in Excalibur Promotions, a rival independent group. At one time, Coralluzzo and Goodhart were close friends. They have since become bitter enemies.

When contacted, Goodhart, who is usually not at a loss for words, declined to elaborate on why his promotion fell apart. "If you want to quote me, just quote me as I'm out of the wrestling business. It's behind me and I'm not going to discuss it," he said. "I'm out of it completely. I'm in the insurance investment business, which is where I was before I got into the wrestling business." This was not the same Goodhart that told Evan Ginzburg of *Wrestling Then & Now* (Issue #24) at John Arezzi's Wrestling Convention in August that the TWA would "become the next Memphis."

"The guy that buys the tickets is the bottom line," said Sharpe. "They're the ones that have to be happy. How do you think a guy feels after he calls up to give his opinion on the show (referring to Goodhart's weekly wrestling radio show) and the guy hangs up on him? Would you go back to the guy?"

One of Goodhart's biggest problems was the way he booked his cards: first blood matches, steel cage matches, brawling in the seats and heavy juice were staples of the TWA promotion. Although there were some fans who went to TWA cards to specifically see juice festivals, there were just as many, or maybe more, who refused to see another Goodhart card. Reportedly, dozens of fans walked out of some TWA cards due to their excessive violence. Additionally, many TWA cards were over four hours long. Between the unrestrained violence and the sheer length of the cards, many fans were burned out prior to the cards' main events.

"He would book matches that he'd want to see and not matches that the fans would want to see," Sharpe said. "If he would have sat down and listened to what the people were trying to tell him when they called into his radio station and sorted out the good from the bad, he would have probably been successful."

Goodhart, however, refused to listen. He did things his own way and wouldn't ask advice from anyone. Goodhart brought in top independent talent and paid them top dollar. Sharpe claims Goodhart paid certain wrestlers \$1,000 to \$1,200 an appearance, while Excalibur paid those same wrestlers \$500 a show. Goodhart charged more for his big shows than the WWF or WCW, but he was able to draw more fans than WCW could in Philadelphia. Although Goodhart drew strong houses to Pennsylvania Hall, some as much as \$30,000 to \$35,000, he lost money on nearly all of them. At the same time, a \$9,000 to \$10,000 Excalibur show would net \$3,000 to \$4,000 for Sharpe and Coralluzzo.

Although big name talent drew people to TWA shows, Goodhart should have taken the time to work with his local core wrestlers including D.C. Drake, Johnny Hot Body, Tony Stetson and J.T. Smith. He had the right idea when he opened up a local wrestling school, but he failed to follow through. Instead of promoting his own wrestlers properly, he decided to bring in top wrestlers. When Goodhart presented spot shows, attendance was low because nobody wanted to see the local wrestlers.

"He brought too many stars in," said Ivan Koloff, who worked for Goodhart. "He tried to grow too big, too fast. If he would have just brought four or even six (wrestlers) for a big show, talent, known talent, stars, he would have been able to exist a lot longer. But, at times, he has as much as a dozen to 14 names. Whenever you have big transportation guarantees, a lot of them insist on hotels. It was inevitable. Even if he sold out, his cost was more than what his revenue would be."

I met Goodhart once. Paul and I were at Arezzi's Wrestling Convention when Goodhart walked up to our booth. He picked up a copy of the newsletter, thumbed through it and spoke to me for a minute; actually it was more like he bragged for a minute. After our brief conversation, I was left with the impression that Goodhart's brash personality is the way he hides his insecurity. I don't claim to be a psychologist, but a person who has worked for Goodhart concurred with my evaluation.

Wrestling was Goodhart's life and now it's gone. At one time, he was the most well-known independent promoter in the country. Goodhart bragged that he would be promoting more shows and expand into Florida. He said he would be on television within a few months and could occasionally be heard saying that he was going to run Vince McMahon out of business. Goodhart carved out his own niche, usually put on a good show, but as it turns out, he didn't know what he was doing.

"He was a wrestling fan who became a wrestling talk show host who became a wrestling fan club president who became a wrestling promoter who became a wrestling instructor by having a school." Said Sharpe. "He should have quit when he was a fan."

Sidelines

Thanks To Tim D'Allaird for helping us improve the distribution of *Wrestling Perspective*.

A Triple Play Of Comedy is available from Lance LeVine, Jeff Mullins and Vic Stanley. All three of these talented writers have special issues of their bulletins available and here they are: *Chokehold* is LeVine's sort of monthly, but not really irreverent and very funny publication. The latest issue is a triple issue featuring the reader's year end awards which are off the beaten track, so to speak. For the latest *Chokehold* send \$3.00 to Lance LeVine, 507 W. 43rd Place, Chicago, IL 60609. Mullins has published an 18 page double issue of the infamous and always hilarious *Pro Wrestling Sushi* and is selling it for his single issue price of \$1.50. Subscribers who send \$6.00 for four issues will receive the double issue as an added bonus. Send your subscription to Jeff Mullins, PO Box 36189, San Jose, CA 95158. Finally, Stanley has launched the first issue of *Screw Job Finish*. If your familiar with Stanley's talent through *Wrestling Perspective*, you know he is an excellent writer. He is also extremely clever and funny. This fanzine should take off and we hope you subscribe. *Screw Job Finish* is available from Vic Stanley for \$2.50 per issue at PO Box 176, Lafayette, IN 47902-0176. Our recommendation, send each of these guys a few bucks and laugh until your abdominal muscles look like Rick Rude's.

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Exposing The Business On Tape

By - Tim Whitehead

On February 24, 1991, The Freebirds defeated Doom to capture the WCW World Tag Team Titles at *WrestleWar '91* in Phoenix, Arizona. To fans watching this event live in the arena, and to many more watching at home on pay-per-view, this was a significant moment in wrestling history. A pair of world belts had changed hands. True, it wasn't the greatest title change of all time, or even of the year, but to a hardcore fan any title change has a special meaning. As icing on the cake, the team of Doom argued and split up afterwards, triggering a feud between Ron Simmons and Butch Reed.

To the vast majority of fans viewing this event, all seemed right with the world. But one can only imagine the confusion, and possibly anger, felt by fans in Montgomery, AL. Six days before the live *WrestleWar* show, the Freebirds had lost the WCW World tag belts to Rick and Scott Steiner at a television taping. At the same taping, Ron Simmons did an interview where he recounted the treachery of Butch Reed and manager Teddy Long for

betraying him after losing the tag belts. The Montgomery taping wasn't scheduled to air until after WrestleWar, so the drama was played out in the ring as if the PPV card had already occurred, just as scenes in a motion picture are often shot out of sequence to accommodate the filming schedule.

The spectacle of a tag team losing the belts six days before winning them was so preposterous that it taxed the imaginative writers at TV Sports to the limit, forcing Bill Apter and company to concoct a mythical card in Montgomery on March 9, where the Steiners captured the titles. Incidentally, WCW was actually in Nashville on March 9, 1991. After all this, the fans in Montgomery must have felt like the ultimate fools. But the Montgomery title change is only one example of the problems created by pre-taping wrestling television programs and then trying to con the viewers into believing the programs are airing live.

Both WCW and the WWF tape their weekly cable and syndicated television programs weeks in advance, sometimes as much as five weeks ahead of their air date. Because Vince McMahon and WCW want to create the illusion that the programs are broadcast live, there is an almost surreal lack of concurrence between what happens at a television taping and what occurs at house shows until the taping airs. Here are a few recent examples of the television taping time lag:

1) The Patriots defeated the Freebirds for the WCW U.S. Tag Team Titles on August 12, at a taping in Gainesville, GA. Yet, the Freebirds continued to defend the belts at house shows until the title change aired in early September.

2) The dramatic angle where Randy Savage was bitten by Jake Roberts' cobra was taped on October 21, in Ft. Wayne, IN. Savage continued to wrestle at WWF house shows for a month until the angle finally aired. Then, Savage was pulled from house shows to sell his injury.

3) Rick Rude came to the ring for two squash matches at the November 5, taping in Gainesville wearing a title belt. Since the bouts were scheduled to air after the November 19 live Clash of Champions special, where Rude won the United States Title from Sting, this allowed WCW announcers to do voice-over commentary citing Rude as the new U.S. champion.

In its own distorted way, the sequencing of these events seems logical, but it's believable only to the most gullible fan. Meanwhile, the average fan is treated like an idiot. Furthermore, the tape delays provide federations with cover for false advertising. Since an injured or departed wrestler can continue to appear for weeks on videotape, promoters can falsely advertise him as appearing long after he's out.

The weekly cable and syndicated television programs are the most valuable promotional tools the promotions have. They are the primary, and in some cases, the only outlets fans have for information about upcoming house shows and pay-per-views. If these free television shows lie to the fans, or insult their intelligence, they can hardly succeed in selling PPV orders or arena tickets.

In the pre-McMahon era, wrestling managed to draw huge crowds with only a single hour of televised wrestling per week, broadcast from a small television studio. The genie of cable and PPV, which WCW and the WWF have understandably exploited, cannot be put back in the bottle, but surely there are ways that television can be utilized to enhance arena attendance. One way to help restore wrestling to the financial health it once enjoyed is to make the weekly television product more realistic. A good start would be to shorten the gap between taping and air date. For example, tape on Tuesday nights for airing on the upcoming weekend. This alone would automatically eliminate most tape delay frauds, since there wouldn't be that much that could happen in four days. But if something big

does happen, a title change at a live Clash Special on a Wednesday night for instance, then a crawl could be run at the bottom of the screen on the weekend broadcast explaining the title change. Better yet, a special bulletin could be inserted discussing the title change. Seeing the old champion still wearing the belt, with the late-addition report announcing the show was taped before he lost the title would make a positive impression on the viewers.

House show action should concur with what has happened on previous cards, even if the events have not aired on television. In the Roberts/Savage snake bite angle, Savage should have shown up at the next WWF event with his arm bandaged and an announcement made about the snake bite. This would not only have made the event look more like a shoot, but would have also encouraged fans to watch the television show to see the angle itself. Allowing titles to change hands at regular house shows, perhaps even in small towns, would likewise enhance realism, while simultaneously boosting wrestling's credibility. Too much of the action now revolves around the television broadcasts, which has left the house shows without meaning, without heat and ultimately without ticket buyers. Why get excited about a house show when all the title changes, double-crosses and angles occur at television tapings or on PPV?

When a title does change, a good move would be to have the commentators announce that the new champ is obligated to take over the contracts of the previous champion. These would make the title change look spontaneous and also set up intriguing face vs. face and heel vs. heel matches for the house shows. Also, bring back localized interviews. Nothing builds heat for a house show like hearing the wrestlers talk about the local arena.

These changes are technical modifications which could easily be implemented without even addressing the problem of the circus atmosphere that permeates wrestling today. It's clear that wrestling has a long way to go before it restores a modicum of credibility. Making the weekly television product more realistic and less obviously pre-packaged would be a positive first step. At the very least, no one should lose a title belt until they've won it.

Personal Choice

By - Paul MacArthur

The subject of steroid abuse in professional wrestling is, perhaps, the most overexposed issue in the sport. One can rarely pick up a copy of the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, *Pro Wrestling Torch* or one of the other approximately 50 other newsletters without reading at least a few paragraphs on the subject. The issues surrounding the subject, both directly related and those on the periphery, are several. The dilemmas about this situation have yet to be resolved despite the fact that this is by no means a new issue in the sport. Years after the Road Warriors and Hulk Hogan rose to national prominence, the problems of steroids abuse still remain. The fact is, however, the Road Warriors and Hulk Hogan are still three of the most highly pushed wrestlers in the sport. The message, originally sent in 1983 and perhaps dating back to the stardom of Billy Graham and Tony Atlas remains the same: steroids are a necessary evil to be successful in professional wrestling.

Who is at fault for this situation is often debated. The smoking gun has often been traced back to Vince McMahon for his tendency to push wrestlers whose sole attribute is a bodybuilder's physique, many whom appear to be the direct result of hard training, strict diet and chemical enhancement. The ability to work a great match was secondary to the ability to look like a bodybuilder and have a marketable gimmick. There were exceptions, but they were few and far between. McMahon's own admission of steroid use and his creation of the World Bodybuilding Federation indicates, at the very least, he openly

tolerated steroid use if not outright encouraged it. Had this situation occurred in 1975, when there were over 20 territories, wrestlers would have had the option to work for a different promoter or do what was necessary to be successful in the WWF. However, the situation did not become prevalent until 1984, the same time McMahon began his national takeover and slowly, but ever so surely, put the other promoters out of business or made them incapable of being effective competition. Hence in 1992, the options are limited: do what is necessary to join the WWF, try to work for WCW who may implement a mandatory steroid abuse policy, work regional independents for substandard pay or find another profession. With these options, and WCW can only employ limited number of wrestlers, many of whom have used and may possibly continue to use steroids, McMahon has defined the playing field. For those who truly want to be successful in professional wrestling, the choice is often simple: use anabolic steroids.

By virtue of defining the playing field, McMahon must incur much of the blame for this situation. He can not, however, be expected to be solely responsible for this situation. While he has promoted wrestlers based on physique rather than ability for years, the fact remains the wrestlers took the steroids themselves. The analogy of someone holding a loaded gun and forcing the wrestlers to take the steroids is flawed. Yes, it may have been and may still be a necessary ingredient to being successful in the WWF. Yes, McMahon employed Dr. George Zahorian for years and must have known he supplied wrestlers with steroids and pain killers. It is really unconscionable to think otherwise. Yes, McMahon has been quoted by many within the business as saying certain wrestlers need to gain 20 pounds to make it. Yes, McMahon tolerated and by virtue of his hiring and promoting practices encouraged, if not demanded, steroid use. No, he didn't hold anyone hostage and inject them with the drug. The choice to take the drug was made by each and every wrestler, be it an informed one or not. Be it a reluctant one or a willing one, the decision in each case was made by an individual and, in the majority of the cases, by one over 18 years old. McMahon encouraged steroid use. The wrestlers complied.

Compliance with the unwritten McMahon policy certainly appeared to be the prudent thing to do, if for only one's own financial future. Because of personal situations and family obligations, the decision to use steroids was made out of financial necessity. A wrestler clearing over six figures a year would want to do what is necessary to maintain that standard of living, particularly when one considers how little is really taken home after travel expenses are factored into the situation. In 1985, many talented wrestlers saw their options diminish. They saw wrestlers with less ability get pushed over them because they had, what was perceived by many, a superior physique. For some, professional wrestling was the only job they knew. For others it was their dream come true. In these instances, many made the reluctant choice to take steroids, if only to stay financially secure, or if only to fulfill their dream. The choice in many cases must have been complex. Yet in each case, it was one's own choice to comply with the tacit policy of the sport.

The choice for people unaccustomed to the world of sports, from the inside, in particular those who have never been involved in athletic competition appears to be a simple one: don't take the drug, the side effects aren't worth the benefits. But is that really the case? The star athlete lives a protected existence. In high school he spends two to four hours a day at practice, with one or two competitions, that take even more time, each week. While he is expected to maintain his grades, if he is talented enough in what is considered an important sport, alternatives will be arranged. From high school, he goes to college, often on a scholarship, even if his grades are substandard. When the minimum combined S.A.T score for college athletes is less than 40 percent correct response rate, it is easy to see what is honestly expected of college athletes. Maintaining a high grade point average is not the answer. In college, practices are longer, the competitions more frequent and the academic demands are stricter. Again, the athlete is protected from the academic demands and often the social ones as well. Many college athletes get involved in situations that are covered up or are taken care of in a less than reputable manner, solely because they are star college athletes. Athletic success brings a certain amount of protection not afforded to the

computer whiz who has a 4.0 grade point average. From college the star athlete moves to the pro ranks or finds himself cheated of the education he was promised. The pro athlete continues his protected lifestyle, while receiving great media attention, million dollar contracts and all the temptations our society has to offer. The athlete will do what is necessary to stay on top, but some will fall from grace. But they must truly fail in the most public fashion to lose the protection they have been afforded since ninth grade. Perhaps this picture seems overstated or too general, but consider this: in one semester Len Bias played 17 away basketball games, many on weeknights. He also received over a dozen incompletes during his college tenure. Bias just never quite received the rewards for his sacrifice.

Thus, many athletes never really mature with the rest of society. It is not a knock, but just a condition of the locker room atmosphere. For many, the sport of choice is their life. For two to four hours a day they live the sport which gives them attention, potential and access to privileges unavailable to their peers. When given the option of sacrificing their career, of taking a drug to enhance, many will take the drug. A more vivid illustration is this: a star swimmer is one of the top ten swimmers in the world, without the aid of steroids. Without taking steroids his chances for Olympic stardom, and all the subsequent endorsements are minimal. If he takes the drug, he may be one of the top two swimmers in the world and given all that comes with stardom. The difference is a gold medal or none, Fame or obscurity, \$250,000 a year or \$25,000. For the bleached blonde, shaved down swimmer with permanent goggle marks and dry skin from four hours a day of a chlorine bath, there isn't a choice. Nor is there one for the wrestler, because lest it be forgotten, they are athletes, many college football players, amateur wrestlers and bodybuilders who have experienced the same dilemmas that face every professional athlete.

Many wrestlers take steroids. Some do so out of choice. Some out of necessity. Some are addicted. There is no loaded gun, but to give up a career, a dream and all that comes with it is choice none of us wish to make. The potential side effects are considered secondary for many, not thought of by others and the source of fear for some. But in each case, they have been weighted less important than everything else. Again, \$25,000 a year or \$250,000 a year and possible, but for many unproven, side effects twenty years later. Make that decision when you are 18, 21 or 25. For that matter, make that decision when you are 35. Perhaps it is hard to be sympathetic, as with risks come rewards. Perhaps, as the evidence continues to pour in regarding the long term side effects, the usage will diminish. Perhaps, as the wrestlers of the eighties turn into statistics in early years of the 21st century, attitudes will change. Perhaps no one will remember them. Perhaps they will. Perhaps it's hard to empathize if you've never been in the situation. But for all the rhetoric that has been volleyed back and forth and from side to side about this subject, the true heart of the issue is this: while the choice is personal, the situation combined with the culture the individuals involved grew up in demands the abuse of the drug. The side effects are known, but the abuse will continue. Policies can be implemented and beaten. Only changes in attitudes will create true change in the industry. But, as the change from wrestler to steroid abuser occurred, the reversal will happen slowly. In the meantime, we will watch and the blood bath will continue. Perhaps you may not be sympathetic, but think of a relative or friend who died from the side effects linked to cigarettes. There wasn't a loaded gun there either. In fact, there wasn't even the weapon of a career.

Letters To The Editors

David's article in December really hit home. I had the opportunity to see Flair vs. Hogan in St. Louis during December and David gave me a virtual move - for - move recap. Believe me, it was that bad! I was so disgusted with Hogan due to his not selling anything Flair did. It made Flair look weak and I paid \$32 for two mid-level seats. Never again. By the way, Hogan won on a count out.

Of the teams mentioned in "A Game of Tag," I was only able to see two of them: the Funks and the Valiants. From what I've seen over the years, both are quite deserving of their place.

Michael McGowen
Jerseyville, IL

While driving together several years ago, Jim Duggan and the Iron Sheik were stopped by police and drugs were found in the car. Since the story got mainstream press, I'm surprised you didn't ask Duggan about it. Did you intentionally omit this topic? If yes, why? The Duggan interview re-taught us what we already knew: the WWF wrestler deals with the mainstream press by lying to it.

Stephen Meyerson
Brooklyn, NY

DS - The Jim Duggan interview that appeared in Issue #22 was used for an article about the Royal Rumble in The Record newspaper of Troy, New York. The transcript was reprinted to show Wrestling Perspective readers how WWF wrestlers conduct themselves during interviews with the mainstream media. The Billy Graham interview that appeared in the same issue was for a wrestling newsletter and a newspaper article. As you probably noticed, the questions and the mood of the two interviews were quite different. I didn't feel it was appropriate to talk to Duggan about an arrest that occurred five years ago, when the focus of the story was on the Royal Rumble, with a sidebar on steroid abuse in wrestling. I don't believe discussing the arrest would have served any purpose.

Next Issue will feature an exclusive interview with Ivan Koloff.
Don't miss it!

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